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2007

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10-23-2007

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Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "10/23/2007 - 3 Generations Of Navajo Women To Speak About Keeping Traditions Alive.pdf" (2007). 2007. 68.

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3 Generations of Navajo Women to Speak About Keeping Traditions Alive

Oct-23-2007

Three generations of Navajo women will kick off Native American Heritage Month activities at Eastern Illinois University by talking about how they keep their traditions alive in today's world.

A Navajo medicine woman will be joined by two daughters and a teenage great-granddaughter to discuss life at the Grand Canyon Navajo Reservation, including their family customs, foods, textiles, housing and environmental respect.

Their presentation is set for 11 a.m. to noon Friday, Oct. 26, in the Tarble Arts Center Atrium. Admission is free, and the public is invited. The women will sell their jewelry and textiles before and after the presentation.

The Navajo women were asked to speak at EIU by Pat McCallister, a professor in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences. McCallister met the family while on her sabbatical in Santa Fe, N.M.

"I was most fascinated how they attempt to keep their Navajo traditions alive but still sustain and adapt their lives to outside forces," McCallister said.

The great-grandmother, Dorothy Walker, speaks only Navajo. A daughter, Angela Maloney, will translate for her.

Another daughter, Mae Peshlakai, is a weaver/silversmith who "works very hard to keep the Navajo traditions alive within the extended family," McCallister said.

Peshlakai's granddaughter, Shelby Nez, is a teenager attending public school. "With parents who are both Navajo, she appreciates the Navajo traditions, but she is active with peers in the non-Navajo world," McCallister said.

The presentation is sponsored by the EIU School of Family and Consumer Sciences' Retention and Diversity Committee.

"We believe it is most important to understand and appreciate our diversity and to have the opportunity to hear about their customs and traditions and the struggle to keep them intact within their culture," McCallister said.

The women will be staying in Charleston en route to speaking engagements to Ivy League colleges on the east coast, McCallister said.



Shelby Nez, a teenager who lives with her family at the Grand Canyon Navajo Reservation, will join her grandmother and great-grandmother in speaking at EIU about keeping Navajo traditions alive.

OTHER ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

As part of Native American Heritage Month activities, Eastern Illinois University will host celebrated Cherokee musician Michael Jacobs, who describes his sound as "Don Henley with a Native American twist."

Jacobs' free concert is set for 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 14, in the MLK Jr. Union's Bridge Lounge.

In 2003, he received the 2003 Native American Music Award for Best Independent Recording. This year, he was nominated in two NAMA categories: Best Male Artist and Best Pop Recording.

All Native American Heritage Month activities at EIU are free and open to the public. Other events include the following:

- 10-11 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 3 and Nov. 10: Children's story time, featuring Native American folklores. Ballenger Teachers Center, Booth Library.
- 7-8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 5: "The Tribes of the Southeast" movie. Bridge Lounge, MLK Jr. Union.
- 7-10 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 8: "The New World" movie, followed by discussion facilitated by Don Holly, assistant professor of anthropology. Lumpkin Auditorium.
- 7-8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 12: "The Tribal People of the Northwest" movie. Bridge Lounge, MLK Jr. Union.
- 7-8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 13: "The Nations of the Northeast" movie. Bridge Lounge, MLK Jr. Union.
- 7-8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 26: "The Natives of the Southwest" movie. Bridge Lounge, MLK Jr. Union.
- 7-9 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29: "The People of the Great Plains" movie. Bridge Lounge, MLK Jr. Union.
- Through Dec. 20: Southwestern & Mexican Weavings & Pottery exhibition. Includes selections from the Timmons Rug Collection and related objects by indigenous peoples from the Tarble's collection and area collections. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday; and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday. Brainard Gallery, Tarble Arts Center.